

Press Briefing
by
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State
for South and Central Asian Affairs
George Krol

At the OSCE Ministerial Council, Athens
November 30, 2009

Alex Hamilton: Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Alex Hamilton and it's my pleasure to introduce our Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asia Ambassador George Krol. Ambassador George Krol has been with the Foreign Service since 1982. He served as Ambassador to Belarus from 2003 to 2006 and now he's in charge of Central Asian Affairs at the Department of State. He's accompanied by Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Mission to the OSCE in Vienna Carol Fuller. Ambassador Krol.

Krol: Thank you very much Alex. Thank you Carol. And again welcome to all of you journalists that are here today for this scenesetter. I just arrived today from traveling in Central Asia - in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and then Brussels so I just arrived today. I understand that the head of our delegation our Deputy Secretary of State, Mr James Steinberg will be coming in tomorrow with the delegation, and he will be leading our delegation.

I know that Secretary Clinton was very much hoping to lead the delegation but, as you can imagine, because of the President's upcoming speech on Afghanistan, she has to stay in Washington and is therefore unable and regrets not being able to be here and to lead the American delegation to the OSCE; because I know, having been in discussions in Washington on this particular Ministerial, it is a very important one. It's important for many reasons. I was at the last OSCE ministerial in Helsinki a year ago and in the intervening year, as many of you have been following have seen, that the OSCE has been clearly revitalized and that the American administration of Barack Obama has made a clear and consistent policy of reviving and resetting its relationship with important multinational organizations -among them the very important organization of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe. The United States has taken a very active role in reenergizing the political dialogue, particularly through the Corfu process which you may recall has been a very important initiative started by our host the Government of Greece and, again, I wanted also to thank Greece for its chairmanship for this year and also for the hosting of this Ministerial and for taking up through the formation of the informal ministerial that took place in June in Corfu of starting off the Corfu process which is to look at all questions of European security within the context of the OSCE as the premiere organization in Europe that of, course, covers 56 countries as the saying goes, "from Vancouver to Vladivostok" and it is very inclusive and covers, of course, all of the aspects of security in the three major areas, which are political military, economic as well as in the human dimension, without any one of these you really cannot

speak well of overall security and cooperation in this broad sphere, geographic sphere of Europe and, I would say, Eurasia to include central Asia.

This Ministerial is very important in order to propel this Corfu process of discussion into 2010 in order to be making decisions. I mean, there already been, as I understand from my colleagues in Vienna, almost 10 sessions on various aspects of the Corfu process and that next year these discussions could turn to perhaps more decisions and actions that the organization itself can make in pursuing the- all of these questions that are involved in this process. And also to show that the security issues are anchored within the organization of the OSCE.

Before taking your questions, I would also like to say that it's important to note, the incoming Chairman and I say this as someone who is responsible for Central Asia at the State Department that this is a very historic chairmanship of Kazakhstan, that it is the first chairmanship in the organization by one of the countries that has emerged from the Soviet Union. It is a very important one for that reason but also because it provides, I think, an historic perspective of this organization and from countries that are, as it were, sort of new to this whole process but have a very important perspective to give on this. The United States feels that the chairmanship of the organization by Kazakhstan will be very successful and we with other member states will be working with Kazakhstan as we will have been with the Greek chairmanship and we will be with the future chairmanship of Lithuania to ensure that this organization remains vital and important and revitalized and I can only emphasize before I take your questions that the administration of President Barack Obama and Secretary Hillary Clinton is very much dedicated to this organization to the multilateral aspects of it and the importance of the OSCE in the context of developing a full agenda for security related issues in the Europe and European and Eurasian context. I don't know, Carol, if there are any other issues that you would like to raise. Carol is our Charge d' Affaires at our mission in Vienna and has been here since Friday with a very important agenda, and a very, for those of you that know Russian "XXXXXX" that's a very heavy schedule of discussions.

I think it shows the importance of this organization that we are dedicating so much time and effort to it, as we have through the years. As someone like myself who remembers being a member of the United States Delegation when it was the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna, way back, when we were doing review conferences, and to see what this organization has developed into today, especially under this American Administration revitalizing and renewing its purpose, working very closely with all member states to ensure that this organization remains both relevant as well as effective in dealing with all of the issues that unite us across the entire European-Eurasian-Atlantic continuum of interests. Thank you very much and I look forward to answering your questions. Yes, sir.

Q. My name is Fanis Papathanasiou, I am a correspondent with Hellenic public television. Since there is a high level dialogue between Russia and the United States, between the Presidents, is it important for the United States – this Corfu process? And to what extent, honestly, does the United States invest in this process?

KROL: it is a very important process, and, as I said, when it really started in Corfu, the United States was committed to starting it and making it work. And I know it has been the subject of a great deal of work within the State Department and our Mission at Vienna and it has the personal attention of the Secretary of State as well. It is also a forum for the United States to work together cooperatively with all the member states including with Russia. It is an area where both the United States and Russia have much to offer in revitalizing the OSCE particularly through this important Corfu Process. So, it is a high priority for the United States and also a good venue for the continuation of the discussions and the cooperation and coordination that the United States and Russia are doing across the wide agenda of issues between our countries, both bilaterally as well as multilaterally. Yes, please ma'am

Q [REUTERS] – further to that, do you have any meetings planned with the Russian Minister or the Delegation, bilateral meetings I mean?

KROL: Well, there have been meetings of our delegation with the Russian delegation to go over many of the issues that we have to deal with in the context of this ministerial. I don't know exactly when Deputy Secretary Steinberg arrives here whether or not he's planning on having a bilateral meeting with the Russian delegation. I am not aware right now. His schedule has not been finalized yet.

Q [REUTERS] I have another question...

Krol: Yes, sure, please. And who are you?

Journalist: I am Deborah Kyvrikosaio. I am from Reuters. Kazakhstan has received a lot of criticism about its human rights record and I am wondering if you think that should be an issue during this meeting now that it is taking on the chairmanship.

Krol: well, Kazakhstan as it has assumed and will be assuming the chairmanship of the OSCE is taking upon itself a great deal of responsibility, as the chairman in order to - as it did when it received the, as it were, the agreement in Madrid and made its own commitments at the time to uphold the standards as well as the principles of the OSCE as an organization I, myself, was in Kazakhstan just several weeks ago and had consultations with my Kazakhstani colleagues. They understand very, very well the responsibilities that have fallen upon them as the chairman to uphold the principles. They understand that there are issues in their own handling of elections and human rights, but they are open to dialogue in order to ensure that those principles of the OSCE are upheld in their own country. It is something the United States also insists upon in our discussions with Kazakhstan; that it is important that they uphold these principles both as chairman and in their own activities in their own country.

Hamilton: Any more questions? Well, thank you all very much.

Krol: Thank you.